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SUBJECT: TRANSNISTRIAN 5-PLUS-2 NEGOTIATOR LITSKAI OUT

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¶1. (SBU) Transnistrian and Russian press have reported that Transnistrian "Foreign Minister" Valery Litskai has been temporarily replaced by his First Deputy Vladimir Yastrebchak, who was officially named "Acting Foreign Minister" on June 26. Yastrebchak had informally begun assuming Litskai's duties several weeks ago as a result of the latter's incapacitation, allegedly because of alcohol-related problems, but publicly reported as due to illness. Since May, Yastrebchak has been receiving delegations, participating in "President" Smirnov's meetings with foreign representatives, taking part in all Cabinet meetings, and has visited Moscow for consultations.

¶2. (SBU) It was the Russian press (Regnum) which, citing anonymous sources in Kyiv, first reported on June 26 that Litskai's dismissal was "just a matter of time." Later the same day, the Transnistrian press (Novyi Region) announced that Smirnov had already signed a decree appointing Litskai's Deputy, Yastrebchak, as "Acting Foreign Minister." The same source mentioned that Litskai was on sick leave.

¶3. (SBU) Chisinau contacts, in both government and the international community, had earlier shared reports about Litskai's possible dismissal. Contacts within the Moldovan 5-plus-2 negotiating team were somewhat concerned about the possibility of such developments, stressing the lack of a suitable replacement. Concerns focused on the lack of experience of a Litskai successor. An inexperienced Transnistrian negotiator would be limited to following instructions, resulting in less flexibility and a more limited ability to reach compromise. Under Transnistrian rules, the "foreign minister" is the chief negotiator ex officio.

Comment

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¶4. (SBU) We are assuming that Litskai's announced "sick-leave" will end with his formal dismissal. While it is theoretically possible that another person could be named to take Litskai's place, our best guess is that Yastrebchak will assume the ministerial seat. He has played the role for some weeks in both internal Transnistrian meetings and those with the international community. Another indication comes indirectly from Transnistria's inherited usage of Soviet terminology, in which the term "temporary acting" was used to stress a temporary interim position for the time of official's incapacity, whereas "acting" usually meant an informal probationary period followed by final appointment. The appointment of Yastrebchak as "Acting Minister" in the weeks leading up to the possible resumption of 5-plus-2 talks suggests he will likely participate in those talks as the Transnistrian negotiator.

KEIDERLING